

LETTERS

Sirs:

In your February issue you published an article by Congressman Les Aspin, "The Verification of the SALT II Agreement." The name and, more important, the reputation of your magazine would lead your readership to conclude that the Aspin article is both analytical in approach and accurate in fact. Because in substantial degree it is neither, I ask that the contents of this letter be made known to your readers.

Aspin should as a minimum have presented data pertinent to his topic. That topic is verification that the Soviets do not exceed the force levels authorized by a treaty extending through 1985. Where the U.S. force is largely static, the capabilities of the U.S.S.R. force are being steadily enhanced. Yet Aspin's main chart depicts the "Russian strategic arsenal" at some point in the recent past whereas what counts is the totals they are authorized to have and to which all intelligence agrees they are building. For instance, that chart shows the number of deployed launchers for the SS-18 ICBM, the largest and most accurate in the Soviet inventory, as 170. The relevant total is the 308 or 326 (if operational launchers within Soviet test sites are included) the Soviets will have when the ongoing conversion program is complete. The U.S., incidentally, is authorized to have none of these large missiles. This distortion is compounded by showing the number of MIRV's per SS-18 as "1 or 8," whereas the missile is in fact being armed with 10 individual warheads. As a result Aspin understates by about 100 percent the inventory of MIRV warheads the Soviets will have by the terms of the treaty.

The SS-18 faux pas is but one example of efforts to sell SALT II by the utilization of irrelevant or misleading data. For instance, Aspin states in the caption for the referenced chart that the U.S.S.R. has no delivery systems, other than those shown, capable of reaching targets in the U.S. What about the submarine launched Shaddock cruise missile? What about the Backfire bomber?

In Aspin's general description of U.S. verification systems he states that over-the-horizon radars can tell one missile from another. Wrong. Over-the-horizon radars can tell you that a missile has disturbed the ionosphere but provide little technical data. It is primarily a warning system. Aspin states that we have infrared satellites that can detect camouflaged silos and virtually prevent Soviet hiding of additional strategic weaponry. Wrong. Infrared can reveal the difference between real foliage and camouflage nets. It cannot detect missiles stored under roofs or underground.

Aspin asserts that the Soviet SS-20 mobile missile now being deployed cannot be upgraded to ICBM range without further testing that we would detect. Wrong. The SS-20 is an SS-16 ICBM less one stage. The SS-16 has already been thoroughly tested and has been deployed in a nonmobile mode in older SS-13 silos. The Soviets need only strap on the third stage, or even more simply remove one of the three SS-20 warheads, and the missile is capable of striking U.S. cities. Assuring the U.S. Government that this is not happening is not within intelligence capabilities.

Mr. Aspin admits that the Soviet Backfire strategic bomber (which like the SS-20 is not even counted in SALT II) now has the capability to strike the United States *with or without* refueling. He then states, however, that the unilateral (nontreaty) assurances of the Soviets will limit the "strategic value" of the bomber. Mr. Brezhnev may agree to limit production of the bomber to current rates, but so far he has refused to state what those rates are. Thus U.S. intelligence is in essence being required to verify Soviet good intentions, an impossibility by all logic.

With regard to cruise missiles Aspin asserts that even if the Soviets cheat by adding cruise missiles to their bombers, "it is doubtful that more than about 120 [Soviet] bombers would be available before the expiration date of the treaty." But that is equal to the number of aircraft the U.S. expects to equip with long-range cruise missiles, and moreover the Soviet launch vehicles will be more modern. As *Aviation Week* authoritatively reported, the Soviets have already flown a subsonic-speed replacement for the Bear bomber and a supersonic replacement, comparable to the B-1, for the Bison bomber. Moreover, the Soviets have already been detected testing cruise missiles on their uncounted Backfire bomber, of which they will have 400 or more by the expiration date of the treaty.

Finally, Aspin's entire treatise on verification is silent on the numerous attempts by the Soviets to circumvent the provisions data through the encryption of telemetry, and the disastrous blows dealt to our verification capabilities by the Soviet acquisition of a top-secret manual on our KH-11 satellite and the loss of our monitoring stations in Iran.

The fact of the matter is that given the damage sustained by U.S. intelligence capabilities over the past few years we cannot today verify the much simpler SALT I treaty, let alone the vastly more complex SALT II treaty.

It should be noted that the U.S. arms controllers themselves signaled the non-verifiability of SALT II when they asked in December that the Soviets desist from the practice of encrypting their telemetry. This practice denies us reliable information on the technical characteristics of Soviet missiles, in particular the number of MIRV's per missile. The Soviets balked and counterproposed that henceforth there be no encryption of that portion of the test data relevant to verification—the determination to be made unilaterally by the testing side. (Astonishingly, this suspect Soviet offer is being supported by the Administration.) The question that arises is: If SALT II is "fully verifiable," why did they try to get the Soviets to cease encryption of telemetry?

Lack of verifiability is only one of several major flaws of SALT II, and certainly not the most significant. It only makes a bad treaty worse. Indeed, it can be argued that the Soviets would be foolish to cheat since the treaty is so heavily advantageous to Moscow as it stands.

GEN. RICHARD G. STILWELL

Coalition for Peace through Strength
Washington

Sirs:

General Stilwell's letter is filled with misleading statements. The chart in my article, depicting Russian strategic forces, refers to currently deployed forces, not to those of 1985. Not all SS-18 missiles have 10 warheads. Two of the four versions are fitted with a single warhead; the others have eight or 10. Under SALT counting rules they are all presumed to have 10—something of a disadvantage to the Russians, I would think.

I did not include the Shaddock cruise missile as a weapon capable of striking U.S. targets because its range is only 250 miles, it has poor accuracy and it can be launched only from the surface (a dangerous place for a Russian submarine to be only 250 miles off American shores). It clearly is not a strategic weapon by anyone's definition, except perhaps General Stilwell's.

General Stilwell is incorrect in his assessment of our military capabilities. Over-the-horizon radars can observe the propulsion characteristics of missiles (which is one way of distinguishing among them), and infrared devices can distinguish among their rocket-exhaust plumes. Note that General Stilwell completely ignores all the other detection devices, of which there are many, that my article discusses in detail.

He is also wrong about infrared satellites. As long as the ground immediately around an object in question has a temperature or radiative emission different from that of the surrounding terrain, an underground silo will stand out clearly.

General Stilwell has been given poor information on the SS-16. The missile has been tested only once since 1975, and that test was a failure.

If the Russians deploy a new heavy bomber, as General Stilwell suggests, then it must be counted as a "strategic delivery vehicle," thus limiting the number of other vehicles the Russians can deploy. If they deploy Backfire bombers with long-range cruise missiles, they too must be counted under SALT II. If there are no "functionally observable differences" between these Backfires and others, then all Backfires must be counted and the Russians must proportionately reduce the number of bombers, ICBM's or SLBM's. This is fine with me.

I was silent on the controversies over telemetry and the KH-11 because they arose after my article had gone to press. Telemetry conveys important technical information but very little that is related to SALT II; the little it does relay can be detected by other means. The KH-11 scandal somewhat degrades our capability to get some technical information, but virtually none of this would be pertinent to the provisions of SALT II. Unfortunately, this cannot be discussed in detail without getting into highly classified information. On the basis of what I know as a member of the House Armed Services and Intelligence committees, however, I believe the Administration is right in stating that telemetry encryption and the KH-11 disclosure do not seriously degrade our capability to verify compliance with a SALT II treaty.

LES ASPIN -

House of Representatives
Washington